

Junior Researcher Kim's been working for the Foundation for all of four hours and he feels pulverised, as if an anvil were dropped on his head in that first introductory lecture. It's lunchtime, and he's found a corner so far back in the cafeteria that nobody bothers him, where he can chew and swallow non-anomalous food, drink apocalyptically strong coffee and digest the hard lessons of the morning.

On his Foundation-provided phone, he pages fretfully through the few SCP files for which he has clearance. Most of them have to be jokes. That's how they read. Like very bad, dark, frightening jokes.

Kim's one of eleven Junior Researchers in the new intake, and the other ten are sitting in a separate group at a separate table, chatting animatedly to one another. There are some instructors here and there, munching sandwiches. Other than them, the cafeteria - large enough to seat two hundred people or more - is deserted. To Kim, that seems odd. Site 41 is large, three skulking buildings with significant basement space, buried casually in the forests of central Colorado. Where is everybody?

A man in a grey suit walks into the cafeteria, makes eye contact with Kim and strides purposefully over. The man's suit is sharp enough to cut. He wears a tie pin and a platinum wristwatch as big as a brick. He looks badly misplaced. Site 41 is a working site. There's training, education, research, development, analysis, and even the containment of a very few Safe SCPs going on here. Executives shouldn't ever be here. So what is he? A lost exec, trying to find the helipad? Or a researcher or instructor, dressing for the job he wants, not the job he has?

"Hell of a first day," the man says, holding a hand out. "Alastair Grey. With an E."

"Kim," says Kim. "Paul Kim."

"Good to meet you. What accent is that, if you don't mind me asking?"

Kim blinks. "New York," he says. "I'm from New York. Are you the site director?"

"You seem on edge."

"Well, that figures, doesn't it?" Kim asks. "You must know how that intro goes. It's like an atom bomb to the ego. I just had almost everything I know overturned. It turns out I've spent my entire adult life being 'protected' from 'dangerous' knowledge, as if the whole outside world is a... a ballpit, for under-sevens. Stepping out of that has been... humiliating. To start with. And..." He blinks again. "Hey, what do you do here, exactly? You didn't answer my question."

"You didn't answer mine," Grey says.

"Of course I did," Kim says. "I'm from—"

And then he just stops, his train of thought running off the end of the track into air. It's on the tip of his tongue, the answer to Grey's question, but he can't get the words out. "That's weird," he says, shaking his head.

At this point, he also notices that Grey isn't wearing his badge. This could be an honest mistake, albeit an extremely serious one. But surely execs don't get to the executive level without being scrupulously correct in everything they do?

"Who are you?" Kim asks again.

"Your life story was fascinating."

"What?"

"You spoke four languages," Grey tells him. "One now, and soon zero. Too huge an intellect to specialise, your education was a fusion of biochemistry and comparative literature. You felt as if you'd die if you couldn't find more foreign thoughts to cram into your head. You've been all over the world, hungry, and every country you've ever been to was like landing on another planet. You toy with anthropology, but there's too much world for one human race to ever understand, let alone one human. There's too much human race. We should pare it down."

Kim nods. "Would you excuse me for just one second?" He gets up and hurries to another table, to the instructor whom he met earlier that day. When Kim gets close to her he feels a kind of staticky sensation building up. He tries to shake her shoulder, and succeeds in moving it a little, but it's like reaching through tar. "Hey! There's a problem. There's an intruder. I think it might be an SCP. Doc, look at me! Hello?" She doesn't react. He tries the gaggle of fellow newcomers as well, but they keep chattering and hypothesising, oblivious to him shouting and clapping in their ears. "Hey! People! Listen to me! No, no, no, no."

He looks back. Grey has stood up and started moving towards him, still with that confident smile. And there's definitely something wrong with him now because he's visible through the tables, like an augmented reality holoprojection jammed inside Kim's eyeball.

Kim realises with a stab of fear that he can even see Grey when he blinks. His eyelids close, but Grey is still there, an apparition in what for all of Kim's life has been totally personal, private darkness. The only way he can avoid seeing Grey is to turn away, and even then he feels a radioactive prickling in the back of his eyeballs.

Kim tries to phone one of the newbies. The phone in the newbie's pocket rings, and other than that, nothing happens. Nobody reacts.

"That doesn't make sense," Kim says.

"Do you remember your father?" Grey says.

"I never knew my father," Kim says, edging away. "Mom raised me."

Grey's white smile is a fixture. "These people loved your perspective. They were going to put you to work on anomalous antimemes. But they don't remember you exist. You don't exist."

Kim says, mainly to himself, "There aren't any dangerous SCPs on this site. It's a Safe site. So either you're not dangerous, or nobody knows you exist. And if nobody knows you exist, then that means you're either brand new, or... you're... What's an antimeme?"

"Hell of a first day," Grey says.

"Are you sentient?" Kim asks.

"You seem on edge," Grey says.

Kim bolts. He exits the cafeteria, turns a corner and runs ten or eleven paces down the corridor, to where there's an elevator. He stabs the "down" button and waits. The elevator door is highly polished, reflective. Kim catches sight of a face in the mirrored surface and nearly falls over with shock, because it's a face he has never seen before, and it's apparently his own. "Jesus! Oh, no no no," he babbles. "What the hell, what the *hell*—"

Grey comes around the corner, still only strolling, just as the elevator cracks open. Kim dives in and punches the lowest floor, basement level 8. It's instinctive, although he could rationalise the decision in retrospect. (He can't just get in his car and drive. It's better if Grey stays on site than if he's set loose in rational "reality". And to do that it's better if Kim retreats to the lowest, darkest corner of the site for which he has access. And then waits for Grey, and then locks all the doors behind them. And waits to die...) The elevator starts descending, and the apparition of Grey - visible through doors and floors - disappears upwards, shrinking with distance and perspective, but still smiling broadly down at Kim.

Kim paces in the elevator. *I don't remember what my face looks like. It said it had eaten all my secondary languages, but I don't remember learning anything other than English. So— It's eating my memories. It's consuming information. And I can't contact anybody directly, which means I'm on my own.*

I'm not trained for this.

He hammers his head once against the elevator wall, and stares at his shoes. *But I don't know that. What if I've been trained, but I don't remember my training anymore? What if I've been working here for years and I only think this is my first day? What if I've met this thing before? What if everybody on the site has met it multiple times... and... nobody remembers? Is this what an antimeme is?*

Kim remembers the near-empty cafeteria. And miles of totally unoccupied corridors and vacant office and lab space. *Maybe it's not just eating my memories. Maybe it eats people whole, removes them completely from history. Maybe it's been haunting the site for years and that's why the site's so empty, because it's nearly finished exterminating us all?*

I need to get help. I need to warn somebody. How? I can't talk to people, I can't phone them. I should— I should write an SCP.

But surely someone's already thought of that.

He pulls his phone out. He pulls out the listing. Nearly ten thousand SCP entries. A hundred of them are tagged "antimemetics" alone.

Kim clears his mind. *Grey with an E. G-R-E-Y. 4-7-3-9.*

SCP-4739

Object class: Keter

Special Containment Procedures: I'm disregarding the format, because time is a factor. If you're reading this, you've already been isolated from the Foundation at large. Attempts to signal for help are futile. You are now inside 4739's gullet, after ingestion and prior to digestion. You need to get to lab S041-B08-053 as soon as possible and continue the research until you find a way to stop or kill Grey, before it kills you. Don't read the rest until you're in the elevator.

Description:

At that moment the elevator doors open at basement level 8. Alastair Grey is waiting, still smiling disarmingly. He steps forward.

Desperate, Kim hurls his phone overarm at the creature's forehead. It's a solid chunk of metal and it's a dead hit. Grey reels backwards and cracks his skull against the wall. By the time he recovers, Kim is out of sight, haring away down the left corridor, just echoing, fading footsteps on concrete.

Two forty-five degree turns, and room 53 is in sight, the door at the farthest end. It looks like a submarine bulkhead. Kim spots the keypad from way out. Four digits. He tries 4739, and it works first time. The bulkhead mechanism takes agonising seconds to open up.

"Come on, come on, come on!"

"Do you remember your mother?" he hears Grey calling down the corridor.

"I never knew my parents, I was an orphan," Kim hisses under his breath. For a split second he wonders what Grey might really mean by that, but he doesn't have time to dwell on it.

The bulkhead opens. Kim slides in and pulls it closed behind him, locking the mechanism up again, as if that'll buy him even one second. The lab inside is sizeable, windowless of course, and stacked to the ceiling with a jumble of equipment which Kim hardly recognises. There are pieces of thick shattered glass underfoot. In the corner there's a computer terminal, locked. Kim unlocks it, and there's the same entry waiting for him:

Description: SCP-4739 is a powerful, slow-acting antimemetic kill agent taking the appearance of a male Caucasian business executive calling itself "Alastair Grey". SCP-4739 is attracted to dense clusters of organically-stored information - essentially, extremely knowledgeable, complicated, interesting people. SCP-4739 isolates its victim from the outside world by enveloping them in an antimemetic field which makes it impossible for the victim, or anything done by the victim, to be perceived or remembered. SCP-4739 then consumes the victim's memories and knowledge until they become vegetative and die. This process takes between 15 minutes and 2 hours and is described as being "like Alzheimer's disease in fast-forward".

SCP-4739 is not believed to be sentient, although it imitates the behaviour of a sentient being to the extent that it can appear sentient to the inattentive. Its victims are able to move and act freely, since it is impossible to escape once caught, or to signal for help. Communications such as written notes, graffiti and electronic mail do get sent, and persist in reality, but SCP-4739's effect spreads with each message, making it impossible for an external observer to perceive the message until such time as SCP-4739 catches them too.

The SCP entry which you are currently reading is created and maintained by victims of SCP-4739, because it is only visible to victims of SCP-4739. If you are reading this SCP entry, SCP-4739 has caught you. You are now isolated from the Foundation at large and constitute an effective Foundation of one. You have between 15 minutes and 2 hours to reach Site 41, basement level 8, laboratory 053, familiarise yourself with the existing research, and continue this research until you find a way to contain or decommission SCP-4739, or, more likely, die. If your field of expertise is not related to antimemetic containment, we sincerely apologise, and advise you to start learning. Fast.

"But how do I kill it?" Kim screams. He scrolls and scrolls through the research, which is chaotic and haphazardly arranged, because nobody has found the spare seconds to sort it out. There are dozens of separate lines of research, contributed in patchwork by a succession of victims, all ending with variations on the same final line: "I'm going to try X. If you're reading this, X didn't work and I'm dead, which means approach X is a dead end, and you have to think of something else."

He reads. Nobody has succeeded in physically engaging with Grey. Nobody can stall it, evade it, slow it down, reason with it or redirect it to some other target. People have tried poisoning their memories with indigestible ideas, drip-feeding their memories to Grey to slow him down,

replacing their memories faster than Grey can eat them, and force-feeding Grey too many memories at once to overfeed him and blow him up. They've tried committing suicide by Class-A amnestic overdose. None of it worked. More than a hundred people, most of them apparently possessing doctorates, have slid into the maw of this thing, fought briefly and, with a greater or lesser degree of dignity, died.

There are no remaining untried threads.

"I'm fucked!" Kim concludes. He glances up. Grey's not in the room yet, but Kim can see him strolling down the last stretch of corridor. He's a totally intangible being, physical obstructions are irrelevant to him. He can't be hurt.

Kim clutches the pocket where he used to keep his phone.

Wait a second.

He scrolls again. He finds the three or four sad, desperate wretches who died confronting Grey physically. Combat knife and Glock. Baseball bat (Kim looks up and checks the room; sure enough, the bat's there, rolled under a table). One man, an elderly botanist far out of his depth, said he was just going to try whatever he could find that was heaviest. That explains the shattered CRT television, and the light layer of thick glass on the floor near the bulkhead. There's even CCTV footage of the botanist's attempt. He accomplishes literally nothing. Grey is a holographic ghost, and the CRT drops right through him, imploding when it hits the floor at Grey's feet. The botanist spends the rest of the video's running time huddled in a corner, gradually losing his mind while Grey watches placidly.

The difference being, Kim realises with his eyes boggling, a phone is a solid brick full of information. And before me, nobody tried using information as a missile.

Kim searches for the experiments - several of them, scattered - where the victim tried to divert Grey to a different data source. The general idea seemed to be to overload Grey by pointing him at something containing too much information: the internet, or the terabit feed from a live particle accelerator experiment, or a stack of hard drives containing the first few quadrillion binary digits of pi. But nobody could figure out a way to distract Grey's attention; prominently-placed screens full of data, he would ignore; data beamed at him electromagnetically (radio, laser) had no effect. And nobody could figure out a way to tunnel the information in through the victim's mind as extra memories. It was written off as impossible, closed as a line of investigation.

The hard drives, Kim finds, are right there on the workbench next to the computer. It's a half-rack unit, a cuboidal block of metalwork as big and heavy as a bowling ball. One of the most ineffective conceivable melee weapons.

Kim snatches up the three longest pieces of ethernet cable he can find, and starts plaiting them into a chain.

Then he remembers who he is, and where he is, and what his responsibilities are. He goes to the computer, to the SCP entry, adds himself to the victim tally and writes up exactly what it is he's about to try. Because he might not be the last one, and the world needs to know that this didn't work.

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Grey comes through the lab bulkhead to find most of the equipment in the room toppled onto the floor, to create room for the black and silver drive array that Paul Kim is whirling around his head, on a two-metre chain made of plaited network cable. It makes a low thrumming sound as it whirls. Grey is not intelligent enough to stop moving forwards, and catches the array directly in the side of his head, rack mount point first, like a morningstar.

Grey absorbs a few trillion digits of the impact, but it isn't enough. There's a green snap of light and a noise like a subway train short-circuiting, and Grey's a pile in the corner, his head caved in and the drive array partially demolished in pieces around him.

Kim decides that history can fill in whatever quip it likes best.

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"It was chewing its way up the Antimemetics Division hierarchy," Wheeler tells him in the aftermath. "It was only a matter of time until it bit down on somebody dangerous. Congratulations on demonstrating a basic level of competence when it counted. Dozens of others couldn't."

Kim still feels rattled. But the shock is dissipating, faster than he'd expected.

Marion Wheeler, it turns out, is the Antimemetics Division chief. She is Kim's new boss.

"I want to say it was dumb luck," Kim says. "I want to say that I just threw my phone, it was instinct, it was muscle memory. It was my first day, and I got lucky as hell. ...I want to say those things, but I'm sitting here, and turning those statements over, and none of them would be true, would they?"

Wheeler waits expectantly, and says nothing.

"You're not my *new* boss," Kim says. "You're just my boss. This isn't my first day at all. I've been working here for... well, it must be over a decade, right? I think I've been a professional antimemetics researcher since at least the mid-2000s. It's just that the first thing Grey ate was my memories of everything past the first day. And even then..."

"I see very little luck in what happened today," Wheeler says. "Instinct and muscle memory are just deep forms of training. Like I said, a basic level of competence. An ability to piece your own life and all of your past knowledge back together, faster than nearly anybody else. This is what we try to drill into you. And sometimes, thankfully, it takes."

"This isn't even the first time we've had this conversation," Kim continues. "There've been other incidents. With other SCPs with amnestic powers. You've sat there and watched me put myself back together before."

"And it hasn't gotten old yet," Wheeler admits, with something which might be approaching a smirk.

"How long does it usually take for me to recover?"

"A few months," Wheeler says. "But if you want the honest truth, people in this division are as competent on day one as they'll ever be. You come to the job firing on all cylinders, or not at all. The rest is just fine-tuning and chemistry."

"So what you're actually saying is you don't care about my mental state and you need me back at work now," Kim says.

Wheeler nods. "I need an updated SCP entry, just to begin with. I need you to nail down the model for Grey's predatory pattern and exactly how you defeated it. I want you to work out what it did with the bodies - incinerated, disintegrated, or just left them lying around the site in rotting perceptually cloaked heaps. And I need countermeasures for when it comes back."

"It's not dead? Wait," Kim says. "I think I know this one. It's coming back to me. 'Ideas don't die.'"